

Summer 6-15-2001

ENG 3701-011: American Romanticism

Stephen Swords
Eastern Illinois University

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American Romanticism Summer 2001

Stephen Swords

Coleman 339I

581-6984 (office) 367-6253 (home)

office hours 11-12:30 M/T/W/TH

I do not give you my time, but I give you that which I have put my time into, namely my letter or my poem, the expression of my opinion, or better yet an act which in solitude I have learned to do.

Emerson, 1840

This course focuses on the literary and cultural history of America in the first half of the nineteenth century, a time when American artists and visionaries believed in the possibility of a New World. Politically free from Europe, blessed with what seemed to be (from the Anglo point of view) an empty, rich, and limitless geography, full of opportunities for experiment and innovation and personal success, America had high cultural hopes for itself, aiming to bring into the world new ways of seeing and believing. American artists set ambitious goals for themselves, and some of America's most powerful and enduring literary works date from this period—Emerson's and Thoreau's essays, the fiction of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, the poetry of Dickinson and Whitman are all part of world literature now, read widely and admired in many cultures. In this course, we will read and talk about these and other works from the period, and my hope is that you will come to recognize and appreciate what this literature can tell us about American history past and present, and to understand the degree to which the ideas, perception, and visions of these artists still play a central role in American life, both socially and individually.

Course policies are straightforward. This is a discussion class, and participation is a key part of everyone's final grade, as well as regular attendance and thorough reading. There will also be several papers assigned. In my evaluations, I try to be fair in what I see as an overall assessment of your class performance. Hold up your end of the bargain, I will hold up mine.

American Romanticism Schedule

6/11 Introduction

6/12 Emerson, "Self Reliance," "Experience"

6/13 Emerson, "The Poet," "Circles," "The American Scholar"

6/14 Thoreau, "Walking," "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"; Fuller, from Summer on the Lakes

6/15 Movie:- Cabeza de Vaca

6/18 paper #1 due; length around five pages

Working from last week's assignments, quoting liberally, get at what these people see as the promise of America, what new things seem possible, what new lives may be lived, what new people may come to be. Today in class, we will discuss this, so be ready to share from your paper. Also bring the Heath Anthology to class, so we can begin looking at Whitman's Song of Myself

6/19 Whitman, Song of Myself, "The Sleepers," Preface to Leaves of Grass

6/20 Dickinson, selected poems

6/21 paper #2 due; several pages

Compare the ways Whitman and Dickinson approach poetry. How are they similar? How are they different? Which is more effective for you?

6/22 Movie The Scarlet Letter

6/25 Child, Hobomok

6/26 Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

6/27 Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

6/28 Jacobs, from Incidents from the Life of a Slave Girl; Douglass, Narrative, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

6/29 Movie to be announced

7/1 Magoffin, Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico

7/2 Garrard, Wah-to-Yah

7/3 same

7/4 no class

7/5 paper #3 due; length five or so pages

Discuss the theme of bondage and liberation as you see it in what we've been studying. Include texts or films from each week of the course, and quote liberally.